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L E T T E R

To

A G E N T L E M A N

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THE PHILANTHROPICK SOCIETY; &c.

[PRICE SIX-PENCE.]



Mr. Wilkes:
From the Author.

LETTER

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TO

A GENTLEMAN

OF THE

PHILANTHROPICK SOCIETY;

ON

THE LIBERTY OF THE PRESS.

BY

PERCIVAL STOCKDALE.



TO CHECK THE LEGAL FREEDOM OF THE PRESS, IS TO
STRIKE AT THE ROOT OF ALL OUR LIBERTIES.

Anonymous Political Pamphlet.

LONDON:

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A L E T T E R, &c.

MAY's BUILDINGS: Monday; Feb. 10, 1794.

SIR,

THE letter with which you have favoured me has brought me to the disagreeable necessity of making you a particular, and circumstantial reply.

You say that the note which I sent yesterday to you, from the *Philanthropick* Printing-house, was "evidently written in 'much warmth.' " I did not expect so hasty, and ill-grounded a censure, from *you*. If I had not felt *some* degree of warmth, as a man, an ENGLISHMAN and, an English writer,

B

on

on receiving a totally unexpected check, at an *English* Pres, and from a gentleman from whom I was not at all prepared to meet with anything that was *positively* disagreeable, I should have apprehended that I was sinking to mere animal life;—to human vegetation. Indeed, if my warmth had been such as *you* suppose it, I should not have applied to you, for the continuance of your printer's attention; as I could easily have had my encomium on Dr. HUSSEY printed at a *free* press; to such a press it is now properly consigned; for we cannot, *yet*, in *this* country, against our will, be stretched on the bed of PROCRUSTES. I own that the note to which you referred, was written in a great hurry; as I had an engagement; and as the cause of my detention at your printing-office was quite unforeseen. But the tenour, and language of the note will most fairly decide, whether or no I suffered any impropriety of warmth, when I wrote it. In that note, I termed

I termed the restrictive mode of conducting your press, *unconstitutional*; that was my strongest expression; to Mr. DURAND, I pronounced the same mode *illiberal*; this was the warmest word which I used, in my conversation with that gentleman; and I *only* regret that I used it to *him*, because I observed that it discomposed him for a moment. So delicate should I always wish to be, in my behaviour to those who treat me with politeness and respect. Excuse me, Sir, for being so minute on the subject of excessive warmth, with which you charge me. After many years of experience, observation, and sufferings, if I was, now, apt to be hurried away by an unguarded, and puerile warmth, I should despise myself;—I should equally despise myself, if I felt not a very sensible warmth, on trying, and important occasions. I have always thought the preposterous, and ungovernable heat,

to which MR. BURKE is, too frequently subject, a very unfortunate characteristick, amidst the illustrious talents, and virtues, of that great, and good man.

I think it may now be evident to *you*, Sir, that there was no unbecoming heat, in my short card to *you*, nor in my conversation with MR. DURAND. The misfortune is, that many men, who are equally friends to virtue, and mankind, have extremely different constitutions, and habits; hence, that spirit, frankness, and ardour, which are, ultimately attended with the most salutary effects to the publick, are deemed almost criminal, even by worthy men, who are not actuated by these qualities. I can only say, that I *have* not, and that I do not envy, their cold philosophy, whether it be natural, or acquired.

It

It is incumbent on me, Sir, to give you in this letter, another proof that no improper warmth should have been imputed to me yesterday, by, *now*, deliberately asserting, and demonstrating, that the repulse which I met with, at your pres^s, was *illiberal* and *unconstitutional*. I have no doubt, that you will believe me, when I assure you that I am not writing to you, in *any* anger; though, not, I hope, without those feelings which a good cause deserves. I shall be the more entitled to this belief, if you find that my letter consists not of vain, and frothy declamation; but of close and attentive argument. For the length and earnestness of my letter, I have two palpable, and unquestionable apologies; the one is of a publick; the other, of a private nature. In *your* institution, Sir, as far as it has to do with literary publications, our moral, political, and religious freedom, is evidently concerned,

cerned, and to a certain degree, injured. With regard to myself, you have, on this occasion, rendered a strenuous defence, and vindication of my conduct, indispensable ; because, if the printing of my Poem, at *your* press was inadmissible, on account of the philanthropical plan, by which it is conducted, you have inevitably brought a heavy charge against me ;—*a publick violation of philanthropy.* Do me justice, I pray, Sir, in your ideas of me, as you go along :—I am far from thinking that *you* directly intended, either to criminate, or to affront me ; I only beg leave to insist on a consequence which necessarily resulted from the rules of your society, which *you* had, undoubtedly, engaged to observe. Nor will I foolishly dispute with you, that you have a legal right to refuse me the printing of *any* thing which I might offer to your press.—Every English printer has the same right.

right.—Alas! we may be giants in vice, and iniquity, both to ourselves, and to the publick, if we do all that the law permits us to do; and we may be pusillanimous, and contemptible dwarfs, in private, and publick virtue, if we only do what it requires. I will likewise most readily allow, that *you*, Sir, especially, with whose amiable disposition I am acquainted; and that the other gentlemen of *your* Society, have meant well, when you established your printing-press. In your erroneous theory, you were humane; but, in fact, you ultimately sacrificed, as far as you *could*, in *that* instance, very extensive to very limited benevolence; in fact, you courted the smiles, and the patronage of the timid, the selfish, the arrogant, and the imperious; and you neglected, or rather, you implicitly rejected the suffrages of independent, generous, and truly philanthropical minds;—in fact, you have deserted,

deserted, when you should have maintained, an inestimable privilege of your country. In your scheme for the reformation of youth, as it relates to the diffusion of letters, you have so far lost sight of a genuine, and unlimited *philanthropy*, that I abstain from giving it the epithets which I think it deserves; because I respect you.

Your society, Sir, should have had nothing to do with printing; because *your* plan of printing is detrimental to the publick. You should have confined yourselves to trades merely mechanical. If your boys have the honour to make shoes for my lord of DURHAM, and if a pair of shoes should pinch him, the evil will be a trifle; he will, perhaps, rather give them away than wear them: a poor man will, fortunately, be afflited by his lordship; and the commonwealth will not be injured.

When any literary press is set up, in ENGLAND, which is to be accessible to the publick, it ought to move on *constitutional* principles ;—of all other engines, it ought to have the full scope that is given to it by our laws. Could I have imagined that, on *British* ground, a *Committee* was to sit upon the manuscript of a *free-born* poet, previously to it's publication ; that the vigour of my sentiments was to be frozen by a cold *Imprimatur*, issued by men who enjoyed every independence but that of the mind ? As masters or controulers of a press, you are hostile to the avowed, and indisputable liberties of Englishmen, as far as you can circumscribe them, by your practice, and by your example. You would, undoubtedly wish to have every printing-office in ENGLAND restricted as *yours* is ; because you, certainly, have established it on the footing which *you* think the best one. If

the mere professional printers, in this metropolis, should, in general, adopt the timid system which *you* have chosen, notwithstanding the rampart of wealth which is thrown around you, we should, inevitably, very soon, be a nation of slaves. In times of great wealth, and luxury; or, in other words, in times of civil, and political corruption, the governors of all countries abuse power, in proportion as they may abuse it, with impunity;—after what has been repeatedly asserted, and proved, by our first intellectual luminaries, *I* shall say nothing new, nor controvertible, when *I*, once more, observe, that English liberty can never be extinguished, while the freedom of our press remains; and that, with *this* freedom, it must expire.

I have to make *one* remark, which, I flatter myself, will not be lost on *your* heart;

heart ;—though it will weigh very little, *in general*, with the rich, and powerful ; either from their inability to comprehend it ;—or on account of that callousness, which, from the habits of ease, and luxury, often grows over the mind. Do not you think that it would be right, in every society ; in every opulent individual, and especially of *this* country, while they enjoy all the blessings that fortune can give them, to leave, uninvaded, to those on whom the capricious Goddess frowns, all the blessings which they owe to nature, and to their own acquirements ?—all the ingenuous exertions of the mind ; and all it's noble achievements, in quest of glory ? *These* objects are *their* luxury ; from *these* objects, they derive their splendour :—deprive the candidate for literary fame, of *them* ; and whatever range of space you give to his *person*,

you contract that space to the dungeon of his *soul*.

If, from motives of finance ; if, to secure a sufficient fund for your society, you have adopted the *unmanly* rule of not giving offence (and a most unmanly rule it is, when it is either prescribed, or obeyed, in it's utmost latitude) this plea will not bear a superficial examination. — I am very far from thinking that our civil, and political privileges, are as secure, and as much respected, as many weak men imagine, and many selfish hypocrites pretend that they *are* ;—but of *this* I am certain ; that our countrymen are so habituated to pay a kind of civil worship to the liberty of the press, as to the *palladium* of every thing that is dear to them, that *your* press, as it's pecuniary terms are very reasonable, would

would have had all the encouragement that your charitable views could have proposed, if it had been on a fair, English foundation; and I am thoroughly persuaded, that by far the greater number of our fellow-citizens, in all the ranks of life, would wish to see a press unemployed, which was under any narrow limitations that *our* jurisprudence had not imposed on it. Many hypocrites, indeed; and not a few of them, *holy*, will undoubtedly give you a *douceur*, in the shape of a charitable donation, to maintain those rigid, and despotic rules which will prevent (as far as the power of *your* society extends) the exposure of *their* pride, and avarice, to the light of open day; and in all their deformity. The brightest talents, and a spirit of independence, are, in general, united. If men of these endowments, have the misfortune to enter your printing-office, they will soon desert it;—

you

you may be sure of losing your honourable literary friends ; instead of *them*, it is true, your types may be employed by an ignoble herd of sycophants, and slaves ; of priests, who write for a mitre ; and of state-scribblers, who write for a pension.

Your *conscious*, and, therefore, cautious, and jealous friends, in elevated stations, could not, with a shadow of reason, be offended with you for the true freedom of your press ; because they must know, that what was rejected at *your* office, might, with ease, be printed at another. But little tyrants never reason ; if they *did*, they would cease to be tyrannical.

I can sincerely say, with POPE,

“ Curse on the verse, how well soe'er it flow
“ That tends to make one worthy man my foe.”

But

But if severe satire, either in verse or prose, is inflicted on *any* one, who from the littleness of his nature, and the height of his station, presumes to be proud, and perfidious, the writer who thus punishes that culprit, is a friend to the community ; and a true philanthropist. So thought the great moral poet, whom I have just quoted ; and when he felt it requisite, he wrote accordingly. To ridicule, or stigmatize conspicuous guilt, when it knows that it is secure from the cognizance of the laws, is publick service ; the maxim is so clear, and so cogent, that it would not need the defence of a moment, were not it's general, and cordial reception prevented by conscious, and powerful offenders, who can always raise a servile majority in their favour ; to adopt their prejudices, and to echo their language.

I know

I know that the Bishop of DURHAM deserves all that I have written *of*, or *to* him. I know it, from my own experience, and from respectable, and well informed authority. Indeed, since I made him an object of publick notice, he has been particularly industrious to give that generous *relief*, or *eminence* to his character, which nature, and his manners have denied it. He no sooner gives to the amount of two guineas, in coals, from annual revenues of £.16000, to the poor debtors in the jail of DURHAM, than it is trumpeted over the island by hireling news-mongers. Successful art, and falsehood have been played off, to injure me with our polite, and fashionable circles : the anathemas of brother-bishops were, naturally launched against me ; and the envious and selfish part of our inferiour clergy ; our little malignant Abbés, have loaded my publication

publication of harsh, but salutary truth, with every opprobrious epithet ; not that they have the least regard for candour, or the bishop, or religion ;—but they know that preferment in the church is often obtained by the most disingenuous, and abject means ; and they highly gratify their malevolence, while they make *me* unpopular.

You have much more tenderness for the dignitaries of our church than they deserve, either from you, or from their country. I am always ready to admit amiable, and respectable exceptions ;—but it would be difficult for a poet to create a character more directly opposite to that of the abstemious, humble, and merciful JESUS, than *these* men in general *are* :—yet they profess to inculcate his doctrine ; they pretend to imitate his manners. Is it not justifiable ; is it not meritorious, to satirize these persons ?

D

Every

Every man endowed with an unprejudiced, and reflecting mind, must entertain a spirited contempt of the common morality of the world; when he considers the conduct which that world requires, and the conduct with which it dispenses, in the life of a clergyman. To drink too freely, or to keep a mistress, very materially hurts one of *our* order, in the esteem of those who are deemed the most respectable, and christian part of society. But he may riot in gluttony, and epicureism; he may prostitute invaluable time to cards; he may be as proud as **LUCIFER**; he may be as avaricious as an **ELWES**; he may screw a worthy curate with a large family, almost to death (which many of them most notoriously *do*) and he will pass muster (especially if he comes recommended with wealth and power) not only with ease, but with all the external, and mechanical marks of respect,

respect, at a private, and convivial, or at a publick, and regimental review. Yet it is well known, that these latter vices which are indulged to ecclesiasticks, by the absurdity of popular opinion, are more abhorrent from the tenour and spirit of the gospel, are more severely reprehended by Christ, and his apostles, than the vices which are denied them*.

But

* To give the reader a specimen of the ethicks, and piety of our dignified clergy, I shall, here, observe, that when the *good* men of this country petitioned Parliament (and horrible to relate, in vain !) to abolish the infamous, and diabolical slave-trade, the prebendaries of DURHAM, those guardians of the celestial code of all true humanity, and of all rational freedom, were the slowest of any persons in the town (SIR HENRY VANE excepted) to sign the petition. *Quæque ipse miserrima vidi.* Thus they sacrificed (as far as *their* influence extended) *the well-being of millions* to the eager anticipation of their own aggrandizement ; by sacrificing that well-being to the despotic principles of persons in exalted stations, whose hearts were as callous as *their's* were servile.

I believe that *some* of the prebendaries did *not* sign the petition : I am almost certain that DR. COOPER did *not*.

This

But let *them* enjoy the most groveling and debasing of our sensual pleasures ; let them enjoy their avarice, and their pride ;
if

This man has the effrontery to declare that he is not convinced that the slave-trade is *unjustifiable*. This *doubt*, however, of our great theological casuist I shall charitably ascribe to the weakness of his intellect ; to the northern mist which obnubilates his brain. For I am indubitably informed that he is a remarkably stupid being ;—as, indeed, his aspect, and manner distinctly prognosticate.

I have not done with him yet ; *Ecce iterum Crispinus !* This meek, and edifying hierarch met a poor woman with a penny-worth of coals upon her head, and asked her “ if she was not very thankful that she could have coals so easily ? ” Indeed, my good Doctor, it required no small proficiency in christian philosophy, in this poor woman, to be very thankful for her penny-worth of coals, if when *you* preached to her your laconick sermon (and I dare say, the shorter *your* sermons are, they are the better) she contrasted *your* situation in life with her own ; if she recollects *your* blazing fires, in the winters of DURHAM, and *her* glimmering embers, of which her oeconomy was obliged to be rigorous, even with the parsimony of ecclesiastical beneficence ; if she recollects that *you were cloathed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day*, while *she* found it difficult to cover her nakedness, and to repell famine.

Such

if the world will, with an equal toleration,
allow to *me* my favourite luxury; the glo-
rious privilege of writing with the virtuous
freedom

Such characters as this, are the accurate counterparts of the Scribes and Pharisees, of old, who were reproved by our Saviour for “ binding heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and laying them on men’s shoulders, while they themselves would not move them with one of their fingers !” Mat. ch. xxiii. v. 4.

The Bishop of DURHAM, himself, (to his shame be it recorded) has been a very cold patron of the abolition of the slave-trade; if he has patronized it at all. A letter that I sent to him, while I was in the north, was accompanied with a letter which I had addressed to the excellent GRANVILLE SHARP, expressly written against that infernal traffick. His Lordship, it seems, is mechanically accurate in answering letters from clergymen: but he took no notice of *my* unfortunate packet, till he was obliged to make an insipid reply to it, to save appearances; of which, he, and his colleagues are in general, *religiously* tenacious. I flatter myself, that it will, one day, be known over ENGLAND, that my letter to MR. SHARP, merited a warmer attention. The motives at least, of the writer of that letter deserved, from his holy father, a pastoral, and benignant smile: for I wrote it in his own city; and in writing it, I employed my time virtuously, in solitude; while,

freedom of an Englishman; and of fairly animadverting, when I please, on *spiritual wickedness, in high places.* But, alas! the condition which I propose, is romantick; I am requesting of the rich, and powerful, their permission to perpetrate the most enormous crime that a private clergyman can commit! But if I have not this leave *given* me, I will *take* it;

I WILL, OR PERISH IN THE GENEROUS CAUSE!

and why have I taken this determination?
From the noblest motives upon earth;

I KNOW IT, VIRTUE; AND I FEEL IT, FAME!

For the spirited, rational, and moral freedom which I am now using, the generality while, *not* the devout, but the devoted hours of the rest of his *spiritual* sons were prostituted to luxury and dissipation.

For these free remarks, let reviewers, statesmen; priests, and prelates, pronounce me scurrilous; a draw-cansir; whatever they please.—I know that I am acting agreeably to the will of GOD; and while I *thus* act, I have learned to be totally indifferent to the opinion, or malignity of man.

of my phlegmatick, and dozing brethren; when they condescend to mention me in conversation, pronounce me *mad*: an epithet which is very naturally applied by *them* to *me*; but, I hope, not more properly than it was applied by FESTUS to ST. PAUL. The unbounded light of day can never present any thing to owls but scenes of wildness, and confusion. These profane babblers may not be aware, that they ascribe madness to *me*, for branding with publick, and proper censure, the lineal descendants, in character, of those very Scribes, and Pharisees, whom our mild, and blessed Saviour openly, and with a just, and divine indignation, termed, *hypocrites*, and *a generation of vipers*; and as *I* have the honour to be one of his ministers, I am industrious to warn these offenders *to flee from the wrath to come*. Yes! I would have these puny censors to know that *I* am warranted by the example of our celestial Master

to

to lash *holy* traders in the temple, if *He* flogged *secular* hucksters out of it.

GOD forbid that it should be thought that the New Testament, the adamantine foundation of all true civil, and religious liberty, teaches us to crouch to every insolent fellow, who may be *dressed in a little brief authority!* On the contrary, the precepts, and the example of CHRIST, properly comprehended, and explained, clearly enjoin a generous ardour, tempered with the mildest, and most humane benevolence. One would think that he had been careful to prevent the mistakes of many future christians. To establish, and diffuse his religion, he chose two apostles, whose *souls were made of fire*, to use a poetical expression: ST. PAUL was to be his evangelical herald to the *Gentiles*; and ST. PETER was to be the rock on which he was to **BUILD HIS CHURCH.**

That

That I am sporting no sacerdotal sophistry ; that I am presenting to your view the true complexion of the Gospel, permit me to prove, by a very remarkable text of scripture :—“ Have salt in yourselves, and “ have peace, one with another.” MARK, chap. ix. v. 50.—The injunction of the *former* part of the text should have prevented the corruption of the *latter*. The entire text prescribes a temperature of spirited, and pacific action ; without this temperature, our peace is a total insipidity, or rather, a putrid stagnation of the soul.

THERE CAN BE NO PERMANENT PEACE, WORTHY OF A RATIONAL BEING, WITHOUT LIBERTY ; AND THERE CAN BE NO PERMANENT LIBERTY, WITHOUT A SPIRIT TO DEFEND IT.

My poem contains the following obnoxious sentiments, viz.—if our clergy, in general, preached like Dr. HUSSEY, *I*

E *would*

would raise a throne, even for BARRINGTON: the reader will hardly imagine that these words were inexcusably obnoxious to an English printing-office. That another line in that poem includes a reflexion on the whole bench of Bishops, is a critical decision more worthy of a *reviewer* than *of you*. I am confident that I could not give to the publick a better criterion of my heart, and moral code, than the poem which *you* so much dislike: I wish that it may prove as indubitable a monument of genius.

My earnest appeal to *you*, as to a friend, misled you to suppose that it was possible for me to submit to the final sentence of one of *your* inquisitorial Committees. In my ardent love of peace, and good order, I am quite one of *your* fraternity; in passive obedience, and non-resistance, I am *not*.

From

From my honesty, as a writer, I have no auxiliary but my own mind. *This* is not a vain boast ; it is founded in truth ; in the history of this country ; I am afraid, in the history of mankind. The two great political parties into which this kingdom is divided, are now, if possible, more in the two extremes than ever. I have, occasionally, censured, or praised, the conduct of the leading men of each party, indifferent to every object but those of truth, and humanity. By a necessary consequence, I am disliked by both parties ; because, by my impartiality, I am an enemy to their selfish passions. My political fate, and all my fate connected with it, were just what I expected.

I now wish, as you may be well assured, that my introduction to ORAM's poems had not been printed in *your* press. It was not my fault that it *was* ; it's disinterested and openly

openly honest spirit must hurt *your* habitual feelings ; and I should be loth, wantonly to give uneasiness to *any* man. My principal views, when I write, are to serve the cause of literature, and of truth ; and to repell the inroads of all their enemies.

In a social view, I now see the cause, with regret, which has long prevented me, and which, I fear, will ever prevent me from enjoying *your* company. We are diametrically opposite in our opinions of philanthropy, or universal benevolence ; that very essence, and soul of Christianity ; which, when well understood, and well established, is the very *bond of peace, and of all virtue.*

I am, Sir, your most obedient,



Humble servant,

PERCIVAL STOCKDALE.